

Exploring Leadership Practices through Case Inquiry

Supporting Inclusive Schools
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These educators' commitment to ongoing professional learning and the sharing of their lived experiences illuminate how the ethical standards and standards of practice can come alive in practice. The lived experiences of principals provides a foundation for critical inquiry, exploration and reflection.

For the purpose of critical reflection and dialogue, the cases in this resource were inspired by various contexts and dilemmas that principals have encountered within their daily professional practice.

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Introduction

Exploring Leadership Practices through Case Inquiry is a case-based resource that was collaboratively developed by Wilfrid Laurier University, Brock University, Western University, Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Ontario College of Teachers (the College). It is designed to facilitate professional inquiry into inclusive education leadership practices through exploring experiences of school principals. As educators engage with the resource, they are invited to reflect on their lived, professional practice through the cases, case commentaries and subsequent inquiries within this resource.

Initial teacher education and Additional Qualification (AQ) courses can serve as important contexts for use of this resource. AQ courses are key professional forums for inquiring into inclusive pedagogies and processes, the ethical standards and standards of practice, as well as for deepening

understanding related to one's professional beliefs, assumptions, biases and values.

The cases in this resource have been written by Canadian university researchers based on interviews with principals and are intended to help facilitate dialogue related to inclusion.

It is hoped that this resource will serve as a catalyst for deepening professional inquiry and reflection into the many dimensions associated with creating inclusive learning contexts for all.

The ethical standards and standards of practice represent a vision of professional practice, guide ethical decisions and actions, and convey the collective ethical professional responsibilities and commitments of the teaching profession. These standards can be another lens through which the principal cases in this resource can be explored.

The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession

The four *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a) provide an inquiry framework of practices inherent within exploring inclusive educational practices.

Care

The ethical standard of *Care* includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice.

Respect

Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* are trust and fair-mindedness. Members honour human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment.

Trust

The ethical standard of *Trust* embodies fairness, openness and honesty. Members' professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians and the public are based on trust.

Integrity

Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in the ethical standard of *Integrity*. Continual reflection assists members in exercising integrity in their professional commitments and responsibilities.



The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession

The five *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006b) provide an interrelated framework for exploring and enhancing educators' professional knowledge, skills and practices.

Commitment to Students and Student Learning

Members are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Members facilitate the development of students as contributing citizens of Canadian society.

Professional Knowledge

Members strive to be current in their professional knowledge and recognize its relationship to practice. They understand and reflect on student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum, ethics, educational research and related policies and legislation to inform professional judgment in practice.

Professional Practice

Members apply professional knowledge and experience to promote student learning. They use appropriate pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, resources and technology in planning for and responding to the needs of individual students and learning communities. Members refine their professional practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue and reflection.

Leadership in Learning Communities

Members promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, safe and supportive learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles in order to facilitate student success. Members maintain and uphold the principles of the ethical standards in these learning communities.

Ongoing Professional Learning

Members recognize that a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge.



Organization of the Resource

The format of this resource was designed to support critical inquiry and professional dialogue. It is organized into the following four sections:

- Cases from Practice
- Discussing the Case
- Commentaries on the Case
- Reflections on the Case Commentaries.



(D. Smith, 2017)

A case inquiry process has been designed to foster knowledge creation and, in turn, help to enhance professional practice.

Cases from Practice

Eight written cases are included in this resource which reflect the experiences of principals. The cases illuminate the complexities inherent in the creation of inclusive learning environments. The cases invite critical examination of practices that can support inclusion or serve as barriers to inclusion. Exploration of these cases may help to inform leadership actions and practices intended to create and sustain inclusive educational contexts.

Discuss and Analyze the Case

To support discussion and exploration of each case, a set of questions is offered, following each written case. These discussion questions are intended to invite readers into deeper examination of the case experience and gain further insights into the educational practices that can help to support inclusion.

Commentaries on the Case

Experienced educators have reflected on each case and have offered their perspectives through the format of written commentaries. The commentaries provide alternative lenses for thinking about the case. Readers are invited, through the commentaries, to re-examine the case scenarios from different perspectives and viewpoints, thus extending their understanding of the complexities inherent within each case.

Reflections on the Case Commentaries

To support further inquiry, reflective questions follow each written case commentary. This process is intended to invite readers to critically examine and interrogate the case commentary and to gain insights to enhance professional knowledge and practices.

Case 1: From Principal to Principal

A large part of successful school leadership is about teamwork. It can be clearly evident when an initiative starts. This is quite different from someone mandating a change and instructing others what to do. It is about developing that initiative and working in a team to make it happen. Some might say, “You gather your team around you.” However, it is not about you and not about telling others what to do. It is about bringing enthusiasm to the development plan and inspiring colleagues in your school environment. Leadership is about working as a member of a team and not about being in a position of power or authority. Leadership is making an emotional and professional commitment to move forward.

As a school principal, is it important to reflect on the school’s culture and learning environment. Initiative, teamwork and leadership are visible in our school. The staff at the school consists of exemplary individuals and every new member is a valuable addition to

the team. I think it is essential that principals coming into a new school are informed about the history of the school and should seek out this knowledge from the outgoing principal. Here is one example to provide background and context.

Last year, we had a student starting her first year of school in Kindergarten. Information provided from her parents indicated that she had many diverse needs and would require some additional care. When the student arrived, we realized that she was severely disabled and needed a significant amount of additional



physical support, particularly with changing and general hygiene. Our inclusive school community welcomed the new student and were deeply committed to our ethical responsibility to provide appropriate accessible spaces to preserve her dignity and privacy.

However, we discovered that we did not already have an existing space that would meet the needs of this student or future students requiring similar additional support. There were many barriers that we, as a team, needed to overcome. Collaboratively, we decided to set up a changing table in the accessible washroom. Looking back at the situation now, I can see that our plan was insufficient, but it was the best solution we could implement at the time. We soon realized that the room was too small and the other students with diverse needs also needed to use the washroom.

Not long after, we learned that an addition was being built onto our school to replace our portables. The new addition was to include three classrooms, a resource room, two washrooms without any particular accessibility features and a custodial room with a sink. The custodial room was big enough to store cleaning supplies and anything else needed to maintain our school environment. However, the custodian had other plans.

The custodian approached us with the idea that we could convert this new supply room into a more spacious and suitable area to accommodate the student who needed additional support space. I knew, and he knew, that following through with this conversion would mean a much heavier workload for him from that point

forward due to the transportation of supplies around the school property. However, he was more than willing to proceed with this new plan for the sake of the student. It was a great idea and that is exactly what we ended up doing. The new planned custodial room became the student's room, with accessible washroom facilities, storage space for her personalized equipment and an updated, adjustable change table. We made it happen as a team, but not without that first initiative.

The custodian realized that supporting a student with additional needs is the responsibility of the whole school community. He understood the importance of putting others first and that self-sacrifice is often required to make a difference in the lives of others who may not have the same influence over their situation. That is just the type of person he is. Although the student was not able to communicate verbally, her smiles and positive demeanor showed her appreciation. It made all of us happier that the student was properly cared for and it demonstrated that everyone plays a role in creating a positive, caring and ethical school culture. That is just who we are, not only as professionals, but also as human beings.



Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. Describe your vision of an effective school team designed to support all learners.

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3. What types of knowledge, experience and/or expertise could members of the school community who are not educators bring to the table to support students with diverse needs? Give one or two examples that you have experienced or that you feel might be plausible.

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4. Explain how this case fits with the principles of *Universal Design for Learning* and the tenets of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

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Discuss and Analyze:

5. How does a school plan for the initial transition of a student with a complex learning profile? What are the varied elements (for example, who would you call first?), steps, team members and roles involved? Describe as much as you can and draw a related diagram from the point of view of the school leadership team, if possible.

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Case 1: Commentary

Case: From Principal to Principal

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

The themes that emerged from this case were associated with several of the domains of the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) for principals. This case can be assessed through the lenses of the following five leadership domains: *Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Program* and *Securing Accountability*. Reflective questions associated with each of the five domains have been added to help support deeper exploration of this case.

Setting Directions

How did the actions in this case highlight the culture of the school?

How could you use the experiences in this case to build a school vision with stakeholders?

Building Relationships and Developing People

How did the principal ensure all ideas were equitably considered within the decision-making process?

Who can assist the principal in challenging the staff to critically explore practices that support the learning of all students?

Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices

How might the principal have encouraged collaborative decision-making to support the learning of all students?

What barriers might exist to the custodian's proposed idea and what steps could a principal take to develop support for this decision with all of the stakeholders?

Improving the Instructional Program

How might collaboration among the staff outside the context of the classroom support the instructional program?

Securing Accountability

How is the custodian's proposed plan an example of inclusive accountability to all students?

What strategies could a principal use to promote collective responsibility and accountability for student learning and well-being?

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Discuss how the commentary is attempting to illuminate core issues and practices embedded in this case.

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2. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 2:

YOU are “THE ONE”: The Case of Miss Olivetti

Every few years, we have one or two teachers in our school who can be difficult to work with and hard to please. There have been times I have overheard other staff members refer to these teachers as, ‘Negative Nellies,’ a pet name for people you work with who can be challenging to get along with almost all of the time and with almost everyone.

We have one of these teachers among our staff this year. Her name is Miss Olivetti and she is really an exemplary case. Rarely have I seen a more passionate educator who knows the curriculum like the back of her hand. Although she cares about her work very much, she does not appear to be interested in getting along with the other teachers or support staff. As well, she does not appear to be interested in building positive relationships with her students. I have no doubt that she cares; she is just different from others in how she shows it. Miss Olivetti cares for her students through her connection to the curriculum, through her

experience, through the implementation of her refined instructional strategies and through her classroom management that shows the highest degree of “with-it-ness” I think I have ever seen.

She also tends to raise her voice quite a bit. Sometimes our primary students think she is yelling at them. For example, the other day, I happened to be on my way into her Kindergarten classroom to return a student from an appointment. I was about to knock on her door when I heard her voice...

“I told you already, it’s time to put that away!” I could hear her clearly through the heavy closed door to her classroom. My almost-knocking fist awkwardly stopped mid-motion. “Go, go, go!” she bellowed as I imagined the ‘sweeping’ gestures that were more than likely accompanying her directions. I have seen and heard her in action many times. She has many students in her class this year with diverse learning needs including selective mutism and

print-based learning disabilities. Among these students is Roddy who was standing beside me on his way back to class from one of his many therapy appointments. Remembering why I was there, I continued my knock.

True to herself, Miss Olivetti was opening the door almost before I had finished my knock, sweeping Roddy into the classroom and telling him what to do. Then she nodded her head at me and came out into the hall, keeping an eye on things while the early childhood educator managed the class with an equal level of skill. Cringing a little inside (she was not my biggest fan), I said, “Good morning! How can I help?”

“What are you going to do with this kid?” She said to me and I knew it was coming. “So far, this week alone, I have called you to help with Roddy’s meltdowns where his behaviour has been a challenge including throwing books at other students and hopping up on the top of the class bookshelves. In addition, he cannot read. He cannot write his name. His needs are extremely complex.”

As I thought about my response, I decided to take a risk, one I had been reflecting on recently. I continued gently and respectfully, “Miss Olivetti, we have talked through multiple



strategies and Roddy is on every referral list that exists. But you know I have to wonder, has it ever occurred to you that he needs your support for things far more than his letters?” A few seconds passed and then I said, “You-he needs you. He needs you more than he needs anyone else in this building. You are the only stable force in his four-year-old life. It is you he cannot be without.”

As soon as I said that, her whole demeanor changed. After that, she was one of my biggest advocates on staff. Roddy also started to show some significant and positive changes in his own attitude and academic successes. I worked hard to help her understand that we will work through this together. I also think that for the first time in her career, she really understood how important she is, especially in the lives of our very complex students who have additional needs. School, of course, is not just about writing words. School is about approaching and teaching the whole child and about preserving the dignity of all students and educators in the school environment. This situation has proven to be a significant professional learning experience for me as well, and gives me hope and confidence that the ‘Negative Nellies’ can change.



Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. Describe how you would support positive and inclusive role models and mentoring in the school environment.

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3. Discuss a situation where it was clear to you that you, or a staff member, was the right person for that student at the time?

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4. If you were to use this case in an interview and you asked the interviewee, “How are you going to support the development of this student?” what type of response would you like to hear?

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Discuss and Analyze:

5. What does this case teach about the development of empathy and how you can model empathy for your staff members?

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6. What stereotyping or stigmatizing do you see present in this case (for example, 'Negative Nellies')?

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7. Why did the principal knock on the door of the kindergarten class?

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Case 2: Commentary

Case: YOU are “THE ONE”: The Case of Miss Olivetti

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

One of the hardest things to understand is how to maintain collegial relationships when you are in a hierarchal role in the school. However, when the issue is related to attitude, how do you initiate dialogue related to the need for practices to change in order to better support student learning? You must be careful to not be too critical. A new administrator may be very hesitant to address these issues with the teacher. He or she has to decide where they stand and seek to maintain the teacher’s integrity. As a principal, what approach do you take? Addressing the dispositions held by this teacher will require courageous conversations. How do you handle this type of situation when the teacher is your friend, or if you are in a position of acting principal among your peers?

The conversation in this case was more centered on the needs of the student as opposed to a critical analysis of the teacher’s strategies (for example, yelling). It is nice to see the recognition of risk as a component of the situation. In addition, the support piece embedded seems to

illustrate a strength-based approach within this school. When you believe all of the students can learn and foster a growth mindset, then a culture of trust emerges and courageous conversations can easily occur. Addressing these types of actions is not about shaming or blaming; it is about growth as a community.

Making the transition from the role of teacher to the role of principal is not cut and dried. You do not always know what is needed just because you are a principal. To avoid being disillusioned, a strong mentorship is helpful for navigating and growing into the new role as a principal. This case could have gone another way and unexpected reactions might have occurred. The message is not always received, and when it is not, what are the next steps? How do you transition and understand how to address and support the needs of teachers? It is important to know your staff and be aware of any potential personal factors that may influence how you address situations. By continually asking yourself how to support your staff, you embody empathy.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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2. Discuss the role of the principal that is revealed in this commentary.

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3. Identify the core messages conveyed through this commentary.

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Case 3:

Mr. Goffi's Lessons in Leadership??

As I sat there in the front row of my very first PQP class, I couldn't believe my ears as I heard Mr. Goffi, the PQP instructor, give his first lesson on leadership. I wondered to myself, *Is this guy joking?*

“So you are thinking about taking the next step to becoming a principal. I can tell you a bit about it. In fact, I would love to do it. I know you want to be certain of your abilities to support all students in your school, and yes, we have diverse, complex populations of students in our classrooms. It is a challenge-but one that is really worth it. Before you decide to head off and go after that challenge, realize it would be a mistake thinking it is all on you.

This first lesson for you is foundational. You cannot create an inclusive school all by yourself; you cannot do it without your teachers being fully on board. You will need to make sure that the people aboard your metaphorical boat

are the right people. When the responsibility becomes crushing, you have to be able to trust those people and know that you can pull forward together. It does not really matter who is standing at the tiller; if you are pulling in different directions, that boat will go wherever the wind is blowing it.

The second lesson is that you cannot sit in your office. You have to actually walk around, go to a classroom, look in and see ‘what’s up’. You might bump into someone in the hallway, like some student, and have some inadvertent good timing. You might have a magical effect on that student. You might need to touch base with some students four or five times a day by just walking in and finding out how they are doing. Just that minimal connection can be the glue that keeps some students together.

What I have found in my school leadership positions is that students are similar from school to school. That is why these lessons transfer so well. You will not develop close connections with the majority of students in your schools, but you will develop significant relationships with a small minority of students and they are not that different from place to place. You have students who have learning disabilities, IEPs, behaviour challenges and then you have students with significant learning needs. Most schools have students with varied special needs. Some of them come with some high needs. Special education qualifications are great because you need to learn the nitty gritty, the legislation and how all that stuff works, but the bottom line is, its people skills. That is number three, though it is no less important than the first two lessons.

Then you have situations that occur from interactions with really “complicated” families, “healthy” families and those that are in the middle. Some examples might be:

- When you have a combination of a student that is part of a very “complicated” family, then this may significantly impact the student.



- When you have a student that is part of a “healthy” family, who are supportive, then it works out pretty well.
- When you have a family in the middle that could go either way, the school is trying to pull the student, and the family is pulling WITH us, then it usually works out about the same way-nicely.
- When you have a “complicated” family, where the school is trying to pull the student back and the family is pulling the other way, often this leads to disagreements. Nothing else is as bad as the “complicated” family. You really need to find a way to get that kind of family on board. You cannot do anything without the family. You really want to be strategic in these cases as the family may suck up all your time like nobody’s business. You have to protect yourself-and your time-because you do have an entire school and many other responsibilities.

What we are doing here is a great example of principal-to-principal learning. Well, principal-to-(almost)-principal, in this case. So remember these lessons when that “complicated” family is taking most of your energy, and you are wondering how you are going to do everything else. You might feel that you are alone on your boat, without direction, but you are not adrift-there are lots of us all doing the same thing. Like the educators, principals and staff within a school, we can pull together, to make that important challenge of inclusion happen, and happen very well.”

Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. What elements are *in our control* as school leaders and what elements are *out of our control*? Reflect on the case and how these elements reflect your own experiences. Have you had a situation where it was clear to you that you, or a staff member, was the right person for a student at a specific time? Please explain.

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3. Critically analyze the language and representations of families and students that are used by the course instructor in this case.

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4. How can proactive strategies such as being present support students, educators and families in your school environment? Explain in detail.

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5. How can we build a positive relationship with “complicated” families of students with diverse learning profiles?

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Case 3: Commentary 1

Case: Mr. Goffi's Lessons in Leadership??

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

This case invites considerable reflection and discussion.

I am not sure about the use of the boat metaphor. I prefer to think of the journey as a cross-country tour on a motorcycle with a road map. Principals have control of where they are going. It is about the journey rather than the destination. There are some amazing experiences en route, which can be both positive and negative. Sometimes the route needs to be adjusted, but there are many routes that make the journey exciting.

The theme of building ethical relationships with students, families and staff emerged for me. Each student has the ability to learn and achieve success if the right conditions for learning and achievement are met. Professionals hold the key to creating the right conditions. Kindness, compassion and love must be the guiding light when interacting with all students.

Educators are blessed to be called to their profession. Sometimes educators are the most consistent component in each student's life. All students need love, understanding and a chance to be heard. It is important to treat each student with kindness and respect. An important question to ask yourself as an educator is, "If this

were my child, how would I want them to be treated?" Educators are to serve students.

It is so important to greet students with a "Good morning!" or a smile...for many students you are the consistent role model and all students must feel welcomed and included as part of the school community. Talk with your students; listen to their words and actions, seeking first to understand, then to be understood. It is important to be able to see where they are coming from and to be empathetic to their individual situations.

It is not just about the relationship with the students. It is about knowing and accepting each student, each family and each staff member, and building a relationship of mutual respect and trust with them. This can only be achieved through being visible and present. Purposeful "walks around" are one way that I do this as a school principal.

Selflessness is an essential component in building community, as is customer service and satisfaction. To build community, you must work as a team and know that you are not alone as you can rely on a support network of trusted and valued colleagues.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore the vision of the principal that emerges in this commentary.

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2. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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3. Critically explore the metaphors that you see within your own professional practice to convey messages about teaching.

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4. Discuss how language supports inclusion or supports exclusion.

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Case 3: Commentary 2

Case: Mr. Goffi's Lessons in Leadership??

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

This case invites several inquiries into professional practice. I have identified five different inquiries as I engaged with this written text. Each inquiry is addressed through a written reflection, which serves as my response to the case.

Inquiry 1: What essential lessons do you learn from this case?

The case is intended to illustrate four key lessons. It is impossible to do everything alone in a school and it is important to have a reliable team. Allow everyone to develop their strengths and have confidence in the people around them. This ensures that common goals are set and that everyone moves in the same direction. As a principal, it is important to be present in the school. A principal must be visible and communicate with staff and students on a regular basis. Human relations skills are also essential. It is not possible to have close relationships with all students as some students with special needs require more attention. Effective time management is key, as is developing strategies to be able to communicate with and meet the needs of all

families. Strategies need to be developed to communicate well with families, even those that are very complex, in order to work together.

Inquiry 2: In a school leadership position, what elements do you control and which ones do you not control? Think about the case and your experience.

Members of staff: The case emphasizes the importance of having the right people on board. However, as a principal, you do not choose the staff. Collective agreements mean that you have to work with people who come to your school no matter what their strengths and needs are or what the group dynamics are. It is possible, however, with a lot of work, to build a team that works together and has common goals. This requires a lot of openness, communication, support and honesty. The dynamics between the staff members and the school culture are things that can be changed. You first have to understand the interactions that exist and then put strategies in place to bring about the desired changes. As a new leader, it is important to understand this culture.

Students: The school does not choose its students, including those with special needs. Some students require a lot of support to succeed and have significant needs (for example, academic, emotional, social and physical). Make sure to use the available resources to meet the needs of each student and to set up the conditions necessary for everyone to be successful.

Family dynamics: Again, there is no control over the family environment of the student. Some families have many challenges to deal with. You have to get to know the family and build positive working relationships to ensure student success. Communicating is the first step to creating these links and the direction has an area of influence on this.

Inquiry 3: What do you think of certain words used in this case, such as “complicated” families?

Although this term may describe how certain situations have an impact on the workload of management, the term may give a negative impression to families. It would be nice to believe that everyone has good intentions and wants what is best for their child. It is important to develop open, supportive relationships with these families by listening and communicating effectively. Often, families that are viewed as “complicated” are overwhelmed by the needs of their children and do not know where to turn. These families have had to fight on several fronts to get help for their child. It is, therefore, important to reassure them and create a collaborative and accepting relationship.

Inquiry 4: How do proactive strategies, such as demonstrating your presence, support students, teachers and families in your school?

Student support: Being present makes it possible to know the students. It is then possible to put in place the necessary strategies to support them, to deploy the necessary resources to meet their needs. Moreover, by knowing the students well, it is much easier to intervene when there are incidents. Each student is unique and a more personal approach is needed.

Support for staff members: Being present allows you to know what is happening in the school. Once a common vision is established, it is important to be able to provide the necessary support to staff members to be able to adopt this vision and achieve success. It is also necessary to acknowledge the efforts of each and to celebrate the accomplishments of each staff member. The only way to do this is to listen to what is happening. Thanking and congratulating individuals takes only a few minutes and has a very positive long-term effect on the atmosphere in the school.



Supporting Families: Being present permits you to keep in touch with parents and get to know them. This makes communication easier and more natural when thornier situations arise. Being present can also mean taking the time to make calls when all goes well to open this line of communication and really demonstrate that you have the child’s development at heart. It is essential to celebrate the successes of all.

Inquiry 5: How is it possible to build a collaborative relationship with families to help support the student’s learning?

First, I do not agree with the statement in the text that suggests that the “complicated” families *may suck up all your time*.

You cannot choose to ignore a student’s needs because communication with the family is difficult. Rather, it takes time to get to know this family, to develop positive relationships and to explore different avenues of solutions to support the student in their learning. You are not solely responsible for “easy” students. It is the more complex students who need us most. It is important to listen to the family to try to identify points on which a cooperative relationship can be built. This can indeed require a great investment in time and energy. It is also essential to have regular communication with these families to avoid misunderstandings.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore the inquiries presented in this commentary and discuss the significance of each inquiry for your own professional practice.

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2. Critically analyze how learners are being characterized in this commentary.

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3. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 4:

A Positive Experience for Scott

Ms. Jackson sat down at her desk and looked at the sign on her half-opened door: Ms. Jackson, Vice-Principal. She sighed. *Why in the world did I go down this path?* she asked herself silently.

The day at Hatfield Secondary School had been full of interactions with teachers, students and families. Ms. Jackson had scheduled three school-based team meetings for the following week, dealt with a major theft from students' lockers the day before, supervised bus drop-off and was developing a report on the results of an initiative she had led earlier in the year to support English language learners in preparation for the provincial literacy assessment. And it was only 9:30 in the morning.

While trying to re-engage her mind in her report, she heard a small sound and could not help but look. As she glanced up from her laptop, she saw Scott wandering down the hallway. *Why is he out of class yet again?* she wondered to herself, almost afraid to find out. She continued

to watch as he bent down, picked up some garbage off the floor and deposited it in the garbage bin. Ms. Jackson felt it was time to take action and she hustled out of her office over to Scott. "Scott, could you come here please?" she said with seriousness.

Scott looked behind him and then back at Ms. Jackson. She immediately recognized the complex look that she had seen so many times on his face: confusion, anxiety and a sense of being out of place and lost.

"Scott, come to my office, please." She continued, trying again. Scott's head dropped, but he did follow her. Once in the office, Ms. Jackson picked up the phone and dialed Scott's home, a number that was not unfamiliar to her. Scott continued to stare at the floor.

"Hello, Ms. Stephenson? It is Ms. Jackson at Hatfield Secondary. I have Scott in my office." There was a pause as Scott's mom processed

the call. “No, there is no problem.” Ms. Jackson said, “I just wanted to call you and tell you that Scott did something today that really made my day. I am proud of him. Let me tell you what happened...”

As Ms. Jackson chatted with Scott’s mother, she nodded, smiled and laughed. At the end of the phone conversation, Ms. Jackson hung up and turned back to Scott who was unsure of what was going to happen next. “Scott, you are free to go back to your class with this note for your teacher. I know that some of your other visits to my office have not been so pleasant. But today I want to thank you for doing something that we really value here, taking care of our school property. I hope you have a great day.”

Ms. Jackson sat back in her chair as she watched Scott move back to the hallway, holding his head a bit higher. She remained in her chair even after he left, feeling frozen, almost stunned, with what she had heard. She reflected on the kind of student Scott was. He was in Grade 10. Often, he was barely passing his classes. Many of his courses were at the applied level and he received assistance from

one of the resource teachers who supported accommodations to help him with his learning disability. Ms. Jackson had, in the past months and years, coordinated multiple school-based team meetings to establish learning support for Scott. He certainly was not the most challenging student for whom she had responsibility. In fact, he was one of those kids that often flew just under the radar; not causing a lot of trouble, but occasionally provoking a teacher to send him to the office. But today, what had stunned Ms. Jackson was the comment from Scott’s mother that ended the phone conversation. “Thank you for calling” Scott’s mother had said. “This phone call is the first call I have ever had from any of his teachers or principals or anyone at the school that was about something good that Scott had done.”

Ms. Jackson shook her head, straightened her back and started keying in some thoughts onto her laptop about what she had just experienced. She put her report aside for the moment to celebrate her student and the positive progress with home-school communication.



Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. What could the school be doing differently for Scott? How can schools support students who fly just under the radar?

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3. How can school administrators foster positive communication with parents and caregivers in situations such as this? How can proactive strategies such as being present support learners, educators and families in your school environment?

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4. What strategies do you use to engage students in conversations?

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5. How can school programs support a healthy school culture when the perceptions of staff differ from the school principal’s decisions related to learners?

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6. If you were Ms. Jackson, what might be the thoughts that you would record at the end of this interaction? What would be the follow-up?

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Case 4: Commentary

Case: A Positive Experience for Scott

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

This case illuminates the importance of seeing learners, celebrating their successes and acknowledging their actions. Imagine going through ten years of school without your family receiving a positive message about you. As I read and reflected on this case, a number of concepts and inquiries surfaced for me. I chose to explore this case through the following concepts and inquiries, which reveal what I value in the teaching and learning relationship.



- What impact does the comment from Scott’s mother have on the student’s learning and on the family’s engagement with the school?
- What needs to occur in this school to enable all learners to be seen, valued and respected?
- How can an inclusive, accepting and positive culture penetrate a school and serve as a protective circle around all learners?
- What needs to be present within the culture of a school to ensure all learners are treated ethically?

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore the key dimensions associated with an inclusive school culture that are illuminated in this commentary.

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2. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 5: Tough Love: The Case of Sheila

“No matter what you say or do, you cannot stop me from loving you.”

The words rang in Sheila’s mind.

Was that really what he had said? she thought.

As Sheila looked around the classroom, she could not believe her eyes. The room had been completely trashed. Not one book remained on the shelves. Desks were overturned. The whiteboard had a deep gash in it. Paper, tablet computers, posters and pencil cases littered the floor.

Sheila was shocked.

As principal of the school, Sheila had witnessed Johann’s outbursts in Grades 2 and 3. Often these had been followed by sincere apologies from Johann, both to his teachers and classmates. Johann’s parents had met multiple times with Sheila, the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) and a number of other teachers. They were dealing with similar

“temper tantrums” at home as well and had taken Johann to see his family doctor. However, they did not feel that things were serious enough to pursue further medical help.

Johann’s parents were eager to work with the school and the board. Johann was in queue for a full psycho-educational assessment, but this had been delayed because of other priority complex cases that the school board psychologist was working on. In addition, the board’s behavioural specialist had been consulted to provide input into a behavioural plan for Johann. Although not formally identified as exceptional, the plan provided for a variety of accommodations and supports. Components of the behavioural plan included regular check-ins for Johann with Sheila (he often accompanied her when she took recess duty) and with the SERT, especially when he was feeling anxious and needed to talk. The hope was that this plan would help Johann to manage his emotions in a more effective way. Previous efforts by teachers and educational

assistants to support Johann’s behavioural issues included incentives, punishments and token economies. Despite all of these efforts, the inappropriate behaviour had persisted.

Now this. He had destroyed much of the room. A safety plan had never been developed because Johann’s behaviours had never been of this scale or magnitude. Fortunately, the teacher evacuated the room with minimal difficulty.

As Sheila bent down to start picking up some papers, she heard a voice from behind her...

“No matter what you say or do, you cannot stop me from loving you.”

It was Johann.

Before she could turn around, he was gone.

Sheila stopped picking up the papers and sat on the floor. She had recited that statement to

him repeatedly, on the playground, in her office, as she was on bus duty and when she walked through his class.

Do I really mean it? she wondered.

It sounded right and it certainly reflected the deep value she placed on strong and healthy relationships. Looking at the damage in front of her, knowing that there would be phone calls from concerned families and caregivers soon flooding in, and recognizing that the level of intervention (and paperwork) would now be ramping up, she really wondered if she meant it.

Sheila took a deep breath, turned from the classroom and headed back to her office where Johann was quietly waiting. She resolutely thought to herself, *Well, these are just things that can be fixed, that can be put back together, but this relationship is always here.*



Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. What kinds of school board supports are available for principals in dealing with complex behavioural needs? What kinds of outside agencies can be accessed in cases such as this?

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3. What types of things might the principal have done to support the student and the family prior to the specific incident?

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4. How might Johann’s teacher respond to this specific incident? What can the principal do to support the teacher?

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5. How might families/caregivers/guardians respond to this incident? What might the principal do to communicate with families/caregivers/guardians about the incident and for long-term follow-up?

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6. What next steps should the principal take after the incident?

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Case 5: Commentary 1

Case: Tough Love: The Case of Sheila

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

Incidents are going to occur and as an educator, it is critical that empathy and compassion be at the forefront of everything you do.

No matter how many contingency plans might be in place, unexpected situations will arise. Having good relationships, a positive attitude, as well as the resilience and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances are essential in dealing successfully with the unexpected.

At the same time, you must consider how you are going to address the needs of the teachers, the students in the class, the parents and the student who was involved in the incident. What are your current and future plans?

School policy is much more than just documentation, and for new principals, it can be overwhelming. It is important to understand and to operationalize all levels of policy on a daily basis. This includes considering how you are using your Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and what type of psychological supports are in place, such as mentoring programs.

An authentic leader ensures that legislation is followed, while also working on a positive

culture or climate within the school. Reflecting on the Principal's Qualification Program (PQP) as it existed in the early 2000s, the legislative piece was heavily emphasized. I think a solid knowledge of the legislation can be helpful to PQP candidates who want to work through issues and reflect on cases such as this one, as they can gain exposure identifying issues and potential steps.

Health and safety is another important piece to be considered, in addition to fostering positive working relationships. Valuing and validating the emotions of those involved, knowing your philosophy related to how you handle situations and knowing what resources and services might be available are all examples of how this may be achieved.

Immediate action, consisting of prompt and accurate decision-making, can significantly help to defuse volatile situations.

When situations such as these arise, you will need to address your staff and the students in the class as well as hold a health and safety meeting.

It might be helpful to revisit what protocols are in place and identify any gaps in policy and

procedures. It is also necessary to determine which stakeholders must be notified when situations arise, such as the school board and special education coordinator.

All of the stakeholders involved will be affected by traumatic incidents that occur and it is vital that supports are in place for everyone.

Principals need trusted mentors who they can consult with, or even informal mentorship with previous colleagues that they can call on for support. They need critical reflection with a critical friend. It is important for them to understand the system and their accountability within it, as well as know who they need to inform. It is also essential to know where to document and what kind of documentation is required.

Situations like these can be traumatic for the teacher, demonstrating a need to have various supports in place. Inter-collegial support might prevent stigmatization of the teacher over something that was not within their control. Support for cleaning up the room should be

offered so that the teacher is not left to clean up their room alone, which could perhaps cause additional trauma.

Authentic leadership consisting of a congruence between words and actions is necessary to ensure that clear decisions are made with empathy and preserve the dignity of the individuals involved. It is important for the principal to always be able to connect back holistically to the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (Institute for Education Leadership, 2013).

This would involve addressing the underlying issues behind the incident and determining how the student will be supported in their return to the school and classroom. What does the conversation look like? What communication strategies are in place to ensure that the information is disseminated in the best way possible that preserves the dignity of all involved? Perhaps this might involve debriefing with essential stakeholders and forming a restorative circle with families and teachers in an effort to reintegrate the student into the classroom.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore the vision of the principal that is conveyed in this commentary.

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2. Discuss the possible impact of this vision for an inclusive school.

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3. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 5: Commentary 2

Case: Tough Love: The Case of Sheila

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

This is a complex case, with no magic answer. Situations like the one in this case often happen in schools.

Teachers and principals must build and foster good relationships with their students.

The two main roles principals have are managing and preventing situations. The principal is often the one extinguishing fires. If the behaviour of a student creates danger for themselves and for others, the principal must have a detailed emergency plan in place, which provides staff with strategies to handle crises like this one and maintains the safety of all involved: the student in crisis, the adult and the other students around them.



This plan should also include a detailed prevention strategy, which outlines what can be done to avoid crises. This might consist of providing training for staff, using a Qualified Intervention Person and communicating and collaborating with the student's family, doctor or other stakeholders outside the school community.

After a traumatic experience occurs, the principal must ensure that supports are in place for the teachers and the school community, and that a behavioural rehabilitation strategy is used with the student. If the student has autism, communication barriers can make the situation even more challenging. The principal must also consider how to best explain the crisis to the other students in the class. Finally, this case brings the following question to mind—what is the role of the school?

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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2. Explore the vision of the principal in this commentary and identify how it is different from or similar to the vision of the principal that is communicated in Case 5: Commentary 1.

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Case 6: Fighting Protocols: Ms. Ross Navigates the System

The announcement rang through the halls of Butler Elementary School: “Ms. Ross, please come to the office.”

As Ms. Ross, principal at Butler, walked briskly to the office, she started to think about the school team meeting that she was walking into.

Three years ago, Sam Stevens had been in Grade 6. Generally, his academic abilities were comparable with most of his peers. He had some learning challenges but nothing that had required anything more than some extra support from time-to-time from the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT). Then his world had collapsed around him. Early in October, violence tore his family apart and Sam was removed from the home and placed in foster care. It did not work out well and he fell apart. He fell apart violently.

The school had tried to provide supports. First, the SERT met with him daily. Second, a counsellor was provided for weekly meetings

and finally, a behavioural specialist was called in for an extended period of observation and support. However, nothing seemed to make a difference and Sam’s aggressive behaviour escalated as winter was in full force. The staff desperately wanted to support Sam, but his actions were increasingly endangering himself, his classmates and the teachers.

Ms. Ross reflected on some difficult decisions that she had helped navigate. As Sam’s aggressive behaviour had escalated, she had contacted her Supervisory Officer (SO) and adamantly argued for a specialized placement in the congregated classroom in her school for students with significant anxiety and environmental concerns. The SO was not going to allow it; Ms. Ross remembered the conversation like it was yesterday.

“There is no way we are putting that student in that class,” the SO had said. “Our board requirement is that it is only for students in



Grades 7 and 8. And, it is for kids with anxiety challenges. Sam's violent behaviour is going to make the others even more anxious!"

Ms. Ross was emphatic, "No, that is not going to happen. There are only five students in that class. There are two Education Assistants (EA) and Mr. Nevel is a superb teacher. Besides, remaining in our school allows him to keep contact with his friends and be integrated into classes if and when he is ready. This is where Sam needs to be."

Eventually, the SO reluctantly agreed with Ms. Ross. It was the best thing that could have happened for Sam. He spent the remainder of

Grade 6 in the specialized class. His aggressive behaviour abated. His reading improved. Mr. Nevel incorporated social stories in the class from time-to-time to help Sam with his anxiety and family situation. These strategies and the intense one-on-one interaction and learning offered within the specialized setting, built Sam's trust with Mr. Nevel. He continued in the same classroom with Mr. Nevel as his teacher for Grades 7 and 8 with occasional inclusion in some of the other classes at the school. In addition, Sam's foster family situation had improved and this stability seemed to further encourage his progress at school.

And now, as Ms. Ross walked to the library on a beautiful May day, she thought about the meeting ahead as she would meet with Mr. Nevel and staff from Central Secondary School as they considered Sam's transition to Grade 9. She wondered, *what could we do to make the transition as smooth as possible for Sam? What supports will he need? What program elements will he require in Grade 9?*

Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons that you learned from this case?

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2. What might Sam’s transition to Grade 9 “look like”? Has the elementary school been successful in preparing the student for transition to a “mainstream” secondary school class? Beyond transitioning to secondary school, what other types of transitions might the student be facing?

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3. What do you think helped Sam in the specialized setting?

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4. What kinds of conversations and supports need to occur to support the transition of a student with special education needs from an elementary school setting to a secondary school setting?

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5. Is this an example of inclusive education? Why or why not? What kinds of systemic barriers (for example, policies, procedures and practices) might exist to limit inclusion?

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Case 6: Commentary 1

Case: Fighting Protocols: Ms. Ross Navigates the System

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

The principal's leadership skills were evident by the way she purposefully advocated for the student within the existing hierarchy. The case highlights how hierarchies can be collaborative and reciprocal and emphasizes the importance of relationships when leading a school, both at the system level and school level.

The principal was able to maneuver through board requirements and create a collaborative and constructive conversation with the student's well-being at the forefront.

While the principal utilized outside intervention strategies for Sam, it seems that what was missing in this case was what Ms. Ross could have done herself to foster a relationship with Sam. Prior to approaching her supervisory officer, Ms. Ross had already tried many strategies that proved unsuccessful, but I wonder if she considered all possible options and had reached the limits of her support for Sam in the situation.

Had Ms. Ross had a deeper, more personal relationship with Sam, could she have found other ways to intervene? I wonder if Ms. Ross actually went into the classroom to observe the

interaction between the teacher and Sam. These are just some of the questions that came to mind when reading the case.

In Sam's case, the principal found a solution that could be easily implemented in her school and she fought for it because she knew it would be the best solution for Sam. What are the implications for Sam moving forward given his experience in Ms. Ross's school?

This case highlighted the importance of transition planning. It made me realize how, as leaders, we often make decisions and come up with solutions that help students in their current situations, but not necessarily aid in their future well-being. For example, how Sam's situation would end up once he left elementary school and went on to secondary. Was the school able to get to the root of Sam's well-being and figure out strategies he could use or that could be implemented once he leaves the elementary school system.

Even if Sam was approved to go into another self-contained class, would his current classmates also be transitioning to the same new class with him? Even if this would be the case, it is not

certain that these relational pieces would work in the next phase of Sam’s education. It is important to look at the pieces that resulted in Sam having a successful transition in elementary school. We know that placing Sam into a self-contained class calmed everything down. His family situation became more grounded. His behavior calmed down. Strong adult relationships and friendships were important. Cognitively, we know he is okay and where he should be.

In cases such as these, it is important to have a meeting to discuss what transitional things need to be done, knowing that Sam is now in a good place.

Equity of voice is vital. As a leader, a principal must be able to step back and listen to the voices at the table, navigating competing voices in a way that everyone feels valued and walks away with a certainty that Sam is going to be okay. Does Sam have any say in decisions affecting him?

What about his foster family? How can they be involved so that his transition is successful?

The principal must be able to break down jargon and communicate information to the parents in a way that they can understand. It is natural to be caught up with the logistical and operational pieces, but human experience is the most important lens to consider. The principal must advocate for everyone: the student, the family and staff. It is also incumbent on whoever is participating to have concrete observations, both positive and negative, to have a complete understanding of the situation at hand.

Is there a cultural piece—does Sam have Indigenous roots whereby an Elder could help Sam move forward? Sometimes there are cultural barriers that leaders are not aware of but which need to be considered.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Discuss the essential elements of effective transition planning.

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2. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 6: Group Commentary 2

Case: Fighting Protocols: Ms. Ross Navigates the System

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

When examining the relationships in this case, we can see how the dimensions of the ethical standards are embodied. The supervisory officer, although dismissive at first, did support the placement of Sam by being open, trusting and respecting Ms. Ross's knowledge of the student. The care and commitment to the students' well-being, emotional wellness and safety is evident by Ms. Ross's advocacy for the student and the innovation of the proposed placement of the student in the school.

The principal's reflections on her experience with Sam are important to consider while planning for his transition to Grade 9. Ms. Ross previously advocated for Sam and took a risk while seeking options in providing a safe learning environment for him. The word "influence" is important in this context, as the principal has significant influence. Principals encounter diverse situations, and as a principal, it is easy to forget the influence you do have.

She also understands that each student is unique and that developing programs and plans to meet the individual needs of the student is critical. I think that innovation and creativity can be crucial in finding the best solution for unique cases, as well as accessing various resources.

Collaboration and working through the decision-making process, as a team, to access the expertise of each colleague will be something the principal will need to engage when developing Sam's transition plan.

A belief that all students deserve to be treated equitably and with respect is evident in this case. Educators' practices of seeking the best possible solutions to dilemmas that directly affect their students' well-being is also prominent. Some options that the principal might consider is collaborating with the new school principal and transition team to better understand some of the new policies and procedures that Sam will encounter and determine any challenges that might arise at his new school. It would be wise to collaborate with Sam and his foster parents, other teachers, his tutor, community agency and the new principal to understand and gather multiple perspectives so that an appropriate plan is developed.

Sometimes you need to put yourself in the family/caregiver/guardian's position and ask yourself, "If I had a child with learning challenges, how would I like them to be treated at school?"

Following up on Sam in his new school is a good way to inform practices when considering transition plans in the future. Gathering data and adjusting steps that might not be working well in this scenario will only benefit the student. It will provide him with the security that he is important and assure him that the school is committed to providing him the best possible learning environment in which he will be able to thrive.



Reflections on the Commentary

1. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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2. Explore the ways in which educators can respect, honour and understand the multiple perspectives of all involved in the process of learning.

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Case 6: Group Commentary 3

Case: Fighting Protocols: Ms. Ross Navigates the System

Case Commentator: Guillaume-Racine

I took away some essential lessons when I was examining this case. First and foremost, Sam's situation was a very difficult one, but the principal never gave up. Leave no child behind. A responsible principal should never say, "We cannot save them!"

I could see that the principal promoted a progressive approach, by attempting an intervention strategy, evaluating it and replacing it with another practice if necessary. The principal was very creative in finding an effective solution to Sam's problem. Despite the fact that the self-contained class was reserved for Intermediate Division students, the principal felt that it could be the ideal environment for him. In situations such as these, it is necessary to monitor progress, evaluate effectiveness and ask questions.

Reading this case, I reflected on ways to successfully transition Sam to high school and prevent barriers to his inclusion. First and foremost, it is essential for both principals to meet to clearly discuss Sam's profile, specific needs and to identify available services and a program of study. Strategies should be explored that can contribute to a smooth transition and reduction of barriers, including things such as examining teacher selection and developing appropriate class schedules. Inclusion is not

about accepting individuals in an environment that already exists: it is about creating a new space, a better space, for all.

Visiting the high school with Sam before the end of his Grade 8 year would help him to become familiar with his new environment. This visit could include showing him his new class, walking him around the premises and reviewing with him his new schedule and routine.

Introducing Sam to the new principal, secretary, caretaker and teacher resources would also help to make him more comfortable. It would also be essential for the high school to provide a medical consultation before the start of the school year (for example, diet, sleep and review of medication if Sam is taking medication). If possible, it would be helpful for the school to obtain a psychological report to validate diagnosis and implement recommendations.



At the beginning of the school year, Sam would benefit from a warm, personalized welcome by the staff. Matching him with a buddy would help him to feel less alone. Establishing an accompanying system (check-in, check-out) with an educator might also be helpful. Perhaps placing Sam under the tutelage of a staff member such as an educator, professor or soccer coach, would be beneficial.

There are many things which could be helpful for Sam once he made his transition to high school. Staff with expertise in special education could come up with learning strategies as well as a differentiated and individualized approach tailored to the needs of the learner. Regular counseling sessions over an extended period of time would provide Sam with tools that will allow him to cope with his anxiety. By understanding his state of mind—his

expectations, needs, fears and sources of anxiety—and understanding his perception of education in high school, staff would be able to identify real and false problems and begin to find solutions for Sam. Implementing a monitoring system would allow the principal to follow Sam's progress. This could consist of conducting a case study, meeting with Sam's tutor or the Children's Aid Society as needed.

It is essential to provide support for staff, such as special education or a helper in the classroom, and to define the responsibilities and tasks of this staff (for example, level, intensity and frequency).

Establish a channel of communication between stakeholders to facilitate transition and inclusion. This would include regular exchange with all teachers in the first semester to keep abreast of Sam's progress and to ensure that he is happy attending his new school.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Discuss the key dimensions associated with effective transition plans and processes.

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2. Explore the philosophy of leadership that is implicitly conveyed in this commentary.

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3. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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4. Critically reflect on the language employed in this commentary.

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Case 7:

Self-advocacy in Schools: The Case of Jennifer

“Excuse me, Mr. Sanderella?”

Jennifer’s quiet but strong voice emerged from the back of the classroom.

Mr. Sanderella looked up from his desk and quickly scanned the faces of his Grade 9 Academic Mathematics class. His eyes soon focused on Jennifer’s upstretched hand in the back row near the windows.

Mr. Sanderella was none too pleased to have a question before class had even begun. He had spent considerable time getting ready for this particular class. He typically taught the Senior Division Math courses and he knew it was going to stretch him to work with the diverse needs of a Grade 9 class. He had even worked on a class seating plan, something he did not do with his Grades 11 and 12 courses but which he had been encouraged to do by the head of the Math Department.

“Yes?” Mr. Sanderella responded, eyes returning to his attendance list.

“Um, I can’t see from back here.”

Mr. Sanderella looked quickly up from the attendance list. “Seriously?” he said. “We haven’t even begun so there’s nothing for you to see. Just relax and you’ll be fine.”

Jennifer was not finished. “Mr. Sanderella, you’ve seen my accommodation plan, right? I need to be in the front so I can see the Whiteboard.”

Mr. Sanderella was embarrassed. He had, in fact, seen the accommodation plan, but he had not read it. This was not the way he wanted this class to begin. Looking to redeem himself, he responded, “Okay, let’s get this straightened up right away. Why don’t you hustle down to Ms. Semple’s office and get me a copy of that report? I’ll look at it when you get back.” He settled back into his chair and started calling out students’ names for attendance.

A few minutes later, one of the school’s vice-principals knocked on his door with a teary-eyed, but determined, Jennifer beside her. Mr. Sanderella looked up. *Uh-oh*, he thought, *this is not the way I wanted the year to start.*

Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons you have learned from this case?

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2. How might the vice-principal support the student and the teacher going forward?

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3. What interaction might the vice-principal have with the families/caregivers/guardians following this incident?

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4. What resources could the vice-principal direct to the teacher to support him in his professional learning on inclusive education?

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5. What can be done in advance to make transitions smooth for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or special education needs? How can a school administrator support a teacher when receiving a student with special education needs, whether complex or not?

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6. What role does the resource teacher have in this situation? How do the roles of the vice-principal and resource teacher work together to support the student and the teacher?

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Case 7: Commentary

Case: The Case of Jennifer: Self-advocacy in Schools

Case Commentator: A PQP Instructor

An overriding issue evident in this case is ineffective communication between the various participants (for example, student or teacher). Barriers to effective communication can often be seen in bigger schools, and sadly, it has been my experience that situations such as these happen quite often.

One of the principal's roles is to develop a meeting plan that ensures effective communication between staff. For instance, Guidance Services needs to always inform a teacher of the students that have special needs within a classroom. It is also essential for Guidance Services to provide a list of beneficial strategies for each of these students that the teacher can implement and follow through with. Professional learning sessions should be mandatory to ensure that staff is educated and equipped to serve each student in the best way possible.

This case also highlighted the importance of effective planning. It is vital to consult a student's record before classes start and to consider the student's requests and needs whenever possible. This was clearly not done in this case. Staff should know if a student's profile in Grade 9 is theoretical or applied. Classes need to be

planned, including a transition plan between classes, and the teacher should be provided with a resource binder.

Another issue that emerged for me was the importance of creating a positive school climate and a collective mindset among staff that is aligned with the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. It appeared as if the teacher had zero empathy for the student. The teacher's lack of professionalism and leadership was evident. The student explicitly said she could not see from where she was seated-it was clear she had a visual impairment-yet the teacher made the student feel badly and refused to provide accommodations even though she had an IEP.

I am not sure that having the vice-principal accompany the student back to the class was the best approach. In my opinion, it was not very professional and could have undermined the teacher's authority with his students. I think a more effective approach would have been to send the student back to her class and discuss the issue with the teacher privately after class. How situations like these are handled depends on the organization, the team that is in place, the student with special needs and the special education services available.

Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore strategies for creating a “positive school climate” and a “collective mindset.”

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2. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Case 8:

Transitions and Tempers: The Case of Zola

I have been a principal at my school for four years. Since our school has a very successful French Immersion program, we receive students from all over the community. We often have a waiting list with more than 25 names every fall. Transition remains a big topic in our school. Every year we hold two or three meetings to discuss issues related to different types of transitions. The last meeting usually focuses on a small group of at-risk students heading into Grade 9. Last year's Grade 8 class presented a number of students with a wide range of challenges in terms of learning needs and behavioural issues.

One particular student, Zola, presented a very complex profile. He emigrated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo through Belgium, where he spent two years before coming to Canada. He first arrived to our school the first week of December in Grade 7. His first few weeks were difficult. He complained about missing his friends and extended family. He

did not like the weather. His interactions with his peers were difficult because of his limited English. He even had multiple significant arguments with a few teachers.

In Grade 7, he was sent to my office several times because of a few altercations during recess time. In one instance, while in my office, I took the time to talk to him in French about his journey to Canada. I asked him to show me on a map the countries he had been to before coming to Canada and he showed much pride in doing so. At times, I would notice some change in his mood. After several observations, I started making some connections to what his Grade 7 math teacher told me about him a few times from December to early March last year. He had noticed some elevation or lowering of his mood several times. That led me to convene a meeting with his family to better understand what was happening. Zola's parents confirmed that during his time in Belgium, he started showing some signs of problem behaviours, but it was

not a big concern because they thought it was due to the fact that he was homesick. I offered to look for professional assistance for Zola and find out which services might help him to become more engaged in his learning at school. The family was very hesitant at first, but after several meetings and phone calls, they realized that I had Zola's best interests at heart. They agreed to follow our board's special education processes that resulted in the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for Zola at the start of Grade 8.

At our third transition meeting towards the end of the year, Mrs. Brown, Zola's Grade 8 math teacher, communicated something that took me by surprise. After venting a lot about how difficult a year she had, she went on to say,

“There are a few students that I am concerned about. I do not even think they are going to get a passing grade. And if they do get just enough to pass, I would not recommend them this year for the Academic Math course in Grade 9. The first among these students is Zola. Even though he has the ability to understand math, his work habits, his demeanor, his behaviour in my class, his concentration issues and his communication skills prevent him from achieving highly in math. As you all know, he has been quite disrespectful to most of us. I have not heard once from his parents. They do not seem to care. The grade 9 applied course would align more with the student's learning profile and postsecondary pathway.”



I calmly replied, “That doesn't sound too promising, does it?” I continued, “Why didn't you bring Zola's situation to our previous transition meetings?” I then went on to ask her if she had consulted his IEP since the last transition meeting. Before I could get an answer, some of her colleagues tried to come to her defense. I paused for a second and then asked, “What if Zola was your son? What if he was your nephew? What if we took some time to get to know him? What if... What if...?” The room became quiet and I invited the staff to give me some suggestions for how they thought Zola's situation could be addressed. I adjourned the meeting and everyone agreed to meet again in two weeks.

Discuss and Analyze:

1. What are the key lessons you have learned from this case?
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2. Why do you think Zola’s family may have been hesitant to the principal’s offer to look for professional assistance for Zola in order for him to be successful at school?
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3. What evidence did Mrs. Brown, Zola’s Grade 8 Math teacher, use to recommend the Grade 9 Applied Math course for Zola? In what ways could her argument have been different?
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4. What insight does the case provide into the school culture and its support systems?
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5. If you were the principal in this case, would your reaction have been different at the transition meeting?
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6. What steps would you take next within what timeline?
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7. How much do Zola’s strengths and learning needs impact his inclusive transition to Grade 9?
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Case 8: Commentary

Case: The Case of Zola: Transitions and Tempers

Case Commentator: Dr. Marybeth Fortune, Assistant Professor, Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, Brock University

One central issue that arose for me in this case was the lack of relational trust in the stakeholders involved, including Zola's parents and Mrs. Brown.

Zola's parents are not familiar with the school's protocol and processes, and as a result, they do not trust the school to make decisions that will ultimately support Zola's success. They want the best for their son, but as they acclimate to this unfamiliar school system, they continue to lack knowledge of the various avenues for support the school could offer to foster his success. Accordingly, they are understandably cautious about the school's processes, which they fear may label their son in negative ways. However, the principal's effort to earn their trust is successful to the extent that eventually an IEP is developed for Zola. The principal's deliberate effort to foster relational trust with both Zola and his parents

is evident and demonstrated by his authentic concern for Zola's overall well-being in both behavioural and academic domains.

Mrs. Brown (Math teacher) does not trust the IEP process or the merits of collegial collaboration in decision-making processes. Mrs. Brown has chosen not to share her behavioural concerns about Zola with the principal in a timely manner, which could have led to improved proactive strategies to support Zola's academic and behavioural needs. Instead, she labels Zola as a behavioural issue, which skews her perceptions of his academic promise. Mrs. Brown has compromised the principal's relational trust in her, as the principal realizes Mrs. Brown has let her disdain for Zola's behaviour interfere with what should be an objective opinion of his academic capacity based on assessment-related data, rather than her attitudinal bias.

Other issues that emerged from this case included the following:

- Transition planning, especially if it involves cultural shifts, has a greater likelihood of success if all stakeholders proactively and collaboratively work together.
- Students' behavioural needs may affect their academic outcomes. Systematic plans to address both behaviour and academic needs concurrently can optimize students' chances for success.
- Building teachers' capacity to understand various student-related needs might help them to make educationally sound decisions. Mrs. Brown appears to lack an authentic understanding of Zola's needs.
- Strong leadership in all school-related decisions has the potential to foster successful outcomes, even in challenging situations. More work needs to be done to create trust which lies at the foundation of inclusive practices. Ethically guided educators are compassionate, open, transparent and pedagogically adept. They understand their responsibilities and are committed to serving the diverse needs of all learners.



Reflections on the Commentary

1. Explore the issues raised in this commentary.

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2. Explore the assumptions depicted in the commentary.

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3. Discuss the role of ‘relational trust’ within your own professional practice.

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4. Discuss the implications of an ethically guided education that is presented in this commentary for educational leadership and inclusive education.

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5. Identify new insights or perspectives that this case commentary presented.

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Ethical Resources - Ontario College of Teachers

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